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ABSTRACT

The human potential movement the encourages growth beyond the conventional definitions of a normal or successful life. This movement is entering into a new phase characterized by carefully integrated sequences of the best human potential exercises, put together in a program that enables individuals to take a deep, personal look at their lives. Schools and the culture at large seem most deficient in their capacity to assist people in creating a personal life plan, and in designing educational experiences to support that life plan in students. However, the "second generation" human potential programs are reaching many more people than the earlier, experimental phase and have important implications for public schooling. These new programs are characterized by an educational model with five elements: (1) Emphasis on personal power and personal responsibility; (2) "Release Experiences" designed to free people from disfunctonal patterns; (3) "Stretch Experiences" to support people in moving to new levels of functioning; (4) "Surrender Experiences" to enable people to fully enter into a new living pattern of living; and (5) A personal life plan that acknowledges the uniqueness of each person. (Author/BC)

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HUMAN POTENTIAL EDUCATION AND PUBLIC SCHOOLING

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JERRY L. FLETCHER
SENIOR POLICY ANALYST
EDUCATION DIVISION/DHEW
200 INDEPENDENCE AVE. #317H
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201
(202) 245-8266

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Since the really innovative ideas for improving any established organization are likely to be found outside of that system, I spend quite a bit of my time as a senior policy analyst in HEW's Education Division studying educational programs outside the formal school system. The broad set of educational activities often referred to as the "human potential movement" represents one such phenomenon. For the past two years I have been assessing the implications of this movement for public schooling. While there is much in the movement that is inappropriate for public schooling, or of little value, some of the programs and activities are among the most powerful educational experiences ever developed. It is these that I wish to describe, for I feel we can learn much from them of value to public schooling.

In this paper I would like to develop three major ideas:

1. The human potential movement is entering a new phase, characterized by what I shall term "second generation" programs.

2. The underlying educational model implied by the way these second generation programs are structured has profound implications for the way we structure public education.

3. The implications of the model for public schooling can be extended to suggest an equally profound restructuring of the relationship between people of any age and the educational institutions that impinge on them.

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Human Potential Education: The Underlying Concept

The idea behind human potential education is really quite simple:

> Most normal people, even those whose lives are successful by our usual standards, operate at only a small fraction of what they are capable. Appropriately designed educational experiences can enable normal people to realize far more of their inherent (potential) capabilities.

The thrust of the human potential movement is to get people to go beyond normal--to live "super" lives. People can learn to be super healthy, live lives of abundance and joy, experience giving love and being fully loved, and cope creatively with life's crises. In short there is enormous room to grow beyond our conventional definitions of normal or successful, and in our culture this arena is largely unexplored.

If the notion of a life beyond convention and normality sounds strange, it is only a reflection of the bias built into our culture. Virtually all of the support institutions of our culture are remedial: go to a doctor or hospital if you are sick; to a psychiatrist if you are neurotic; to the unemployment office if you lose a job; to welfare if you can't support your family. That is, one only gets help if one falls significantly below normal. We simply do not have institutional support systems for people who want to get the maximum they can from their lives. In my view the human potential movement is entering a phase of developing such support systems.

"Second Generation" Human Potential Programs

The past ten to fifteen years is best thought of as the first phase of the human potential movement. This time saw the development of an enormous number of particular educational experiences designed to release more of a person's potential as a functioning human being. This phase was avowedly experimental: nearly everything was tried. The experiences had many origins: t-groups, encounter groups, Eastern thought, meditation, gestalt therapy, and mind training. Much of the earlier experimentation focused, of necessity, on techniques, and many who came to participate in this experimentation did so to learn the techniques. And most of this experimentation was done at isolated retreat settings, relatively expensive and away from public scrutiny.

In time the problems with this approach became apparent. Individuals might experience many different techniques, but it remained for them to incorporate into their own lives any insights they might have gained. Many were not successful. The retreat setting workshops apparently did create real change in participants, but when they left and returned to their ordinary lives, the effects pretty rapidly were extinguished. Some system of longer-term support, in a person's normal life space, was needed. After awhile the same people tended to return to the retreat settings over and over--the so-called "growth groupies." The movement was not reaching a broader clientele. And as the experimentation matured, weak or unsafe exercises were gradually weeded out.

The "second generation" programs take the best of the exercises and carefully sequence and integrate them into complete and complex programs of experiences. The focus throughout the program is on the life of the participant, and the exercises are used as a means of enabling the participants to get insights into their lives. Participants are not left to make the integration themselves, afterwards. The organizations providing these integrated programs provide long-term support, such as workshops, additional programs, and counseling. These second generation programs are provided within easy access of ordinary people, generally in hotel rooms and conference centers. And finally there is an active process of reaching out to inform people about the programs through person-to-person contact. Through such mechanisms the programs are reaching many people who would never have considered a weekend at a retreat. The Lifespring program which will be described as part of this Symposium meets all of the above criteria, but so, to varying degrees, does Actualizations, est, Transactional Analysis and many of the separate programs supported through individual centers in different cities in the country.

Parallel Movements in Public Schooling

Interestingly, though it is often submerged in the back-to-basics rhetoric of the present day, the last ten-to-fifteen years have also seen the development of many programs in public schools that parallel the developments in the human potential movement. Known by the various names of affective education, confluent education, humanistic education, and transpersonal education; the alternative schools movement or the

open schools movement, these programs have emphasized developing self-concept, taking personal responsibility for learning, effective interpersonal skills and a broader sense of what education was about than the narrow, cognitive, skills-oriented curriculum found in most public schools.

Much of this work can be criticized on much the same basis as the human potential experimentation. A lot of it was wild experimentation, lacking a solid intellectual base. Much of it was rebellion against what schools did, not a clear conception of movement toward something else. Too often the exercises were one-shot or short-term things, quickly extinguished by the general nature of the school. Even programs that lasted several years found that they could not support the students once they returned to an ordinary school. And over time the alternative schools became places for students who could not make it in the regular school, a special population.

Yet with all this fumbling experimentation, public education is searching for a new conception of education, one that integrates cognitive and affective concerns into a single program focused on improving the life satisfaction and life chances of the student. Since the second generation human potential programs are demonstrably effective and have these characteristics, the underlying educational model should have promise as the new conception of education we seek. Let us now turn to that.

The Underlying Model

Personal Power/Personal Responsibility

Human potential educational programs have a concept of personal power that colors much of what they do. It is a finite quantity for each individual, and it differs in nature and amount for each person. Life consists of each individual choosing to expend his store of personal power to achieve whatever he wants--to maximize his own life satisfaction.

Most people do not begin to realize their full potential because they have chosen to expend their personal power in ways which inhibit their own satisfaction, rather than expand it. For example, many people allow someone else to decide for them how they should act: a spouse, a boss, one's parents. To the degree that someone else "runs" a person, to that degree they have "given away" some of their personal power. Many people also carry around heavy emotions about something: guilt, shame, fear of success or failure, dishonest communications. Maintaining heavy emotions takes considerable energy, uses up considerable personal power, and engenders little satisfaction. In some cases the emotions are so strong, particularly around traumatic events from early childhood, that the causes are suppressed, become unconscious, and the person is "blocked" in a whole area of his life. This is a particularly disfunctional way to expend one's store of personal power.

By this model people usually use up their personal power in ineffective or personally unsatisfying ways. The task of education is to enable people to reclaim their power and/or to redirect it in

directions they find more personally satisfying. The key to this educational process is the belief that at some level, people do know what they really want, and at some level they do know what they have to deal with to get it. The task of education is to get people in touch with what they already know about themselves. Then they can be supported through the process of reclaiming their personal power from situations which are not giving them what they want, and redirecting it toward situations which will.

Release Experiences

All of the techniques of the human potential movement fall into three broad classes. The first I call "release" techniques: experiences which enable people to reclaim personal power that is misdirected, wasted, or inhibitory. Examples of these are assertiveness trainings that help people reclaim the power they give away to others when they continue to go along with decisions or demands they believe they ought to resist; fantasy and dramatic techniques for reliving past traumatic experiences such as psychodrama and gestalt therapy. A relatively new technique, called rebirthing, is used to release one from the trauma of a difficult birth.

It turns out that people in this culture are blocked, at least to some degree, in fairly standard ways: sex, power, self-esteem, fear of success, fear of failure and ridicule, relationships with parents. Well designed sequences of release experiences can unblock people in all these areas, enabling them to reclaim and redirect the personal power that was tied up in the blocks.

Stretch Experiences

Stretch experiences are designed to take the reclaimed energy and focus it on creating more personal satisfaction in a person's life. Stretch experiences require two elements: the identification of what a person really wants; and support over time in taking the steps necessary to create what one wants. However, the way in which both of these are achieved is quite different.

Most of our conceptions about goal achievement and goal selection involve picking one of a number of socially acceptable goals and working toward them through planning, problem-solving, and the carrying out of a strategy with discipline and will. Many educational experiences have been designed to assist people in goal selection and specification, planning, and problem-solving. The human potential movement, on the other hand, regards the question of goals as a very personal issue, one only to be found by looking inward. Again, the belief is that deep inside, every person knows what they really want to do with their lives; it is just that they rarely learn how to tap into that knowledge, and they are not often supported in being true to it. Furthermore, while planning and problem-solving are important, of far greater importance are the fears, the beliefs about oneself, the subjective and often subconscious ways we prevent ourselves from getting what we really want. When these are dealt with, attaining a goal is virtually effortless.

Thus, a major component of stretch experiences involves working on the internal self. Carefully guided fantasies and meditations

enable people to discover what it is they really want in their lives. Fantasy, acting out dramatic scenes, and affirmations are used to develop the attitude that one already has what one says one wants. It is often amazing how once the intention is clear, attaining the goal simply happens.

Operationally, people make commitments to achieve something in their lives that for each of them is a real "stretch," that involves going far beyond what they can comfortably do. Often it means facing one of the things they are most afraid of doing. Then through some fantasy experiences they imagine themselves doing whatever it is that they decided to do, and they imagine it over and over again until they become "comfortable" with it in their fantasies. They also learn to carry on a dialogue with "the-little-voice-in-the-back-of-the-head" that will keep bringing up all the beliefs and fears associated with doing whatever the person is about to undertake. Such a fantasy dialogue allows a person to acknowledge fears or difficulties without succumbing to them. Once the person then undertakes the stretch activity, his subjective sense is so strong that the goal is usually accomplished with a great deal of ease, and the person ends up at a significantly new stage of personal functioning. If it is not accomplished on the first try, there is strong group support for simply acknowledging failure and trying again after dealing with the reasons for the failure.

Surrender Experiences

While this is by far the least developed of the three components of an educational program which genuinely develops human potential, it is becoming a critical element of the second generation programs. Surrender involves freely choosing to become a total participant in an activity, experiencing it rather than analyzing or criticizing it. Since our culture is aggressive and dominating, concerned about objectivity (which demands a certain distance from an event), given to criticism in the belief that hard-hitting feedback is the path to improvement, totally letting go, totally risking, is very difficult. We grow up and live with our defenses high, so surrender is a rare event.

Yet much evidence from fields as diverse as down-hill skiing, the discovery of new scientific theories, or sight reading music suggests that when the highest levels of human performance are being achieved, one is in a state of surrender. People have set in motion a process, which then carries them along far beyond their previous performance levels.

Everyone has probably experienced the state of surrender sometime in his life, if only for a brief moment: all at once one's concentration is total, there is no seeming effort, time seems to stand still, brilliantly creative ideas seem obvious, whatever one wants to have happen seems to take place almost before one thinks about it. The outer limits of human capacities seem to demand this capacity to let go, to surrender. So far very few educational experiences have

been developed to educate this capacity in people, but the second generation human potential programs usually have the ones that are available.

A Statement of Intentions: the Personal Through-Line

The final component, hinted at in the section on stretches, is a personal statement of what one intends to create in one's life over a given interval of time: a week, a month, six months, a year. If generated after one of the exercises which enables one to look deeply inward to determine what one really wants, these statements of intention provide a line through the miriad of daily activities, setbacks, accomplishments, and problems which allows one to stay on purpose to oneself, while still coping with daily life.

These, then, are the elements: a statement of intention about what one will create in one's life; release experiences to reclaim ineffectively used energy and personal power; stretch experiences to move in the direction of creating what one wants; and surrender experiences for the ultimate in performance.

Transforming the School

For purposes of discussion I would like to assert that this three-part cycle -- release, stretch, surrender -- is in fact a basic learning cycle, particularly when buttressed by released personal energy and a personal through line toward what one wants to accomplish. It provides a way of thinking about the design of educational programs in schools that is powerful.

To model a school after the model of education suggested by the second generation human potential organizations, there would need to be some basic experience through which all of the students went, introducing students to the underlying concepts, starting them on the road of discovering what they wanted in their lives. All students would undergo this induction process, and it should be explicitly designed as such. While introducing students to the way the school works, it would also provide the initial release experiences.

Then all the students would create for themselves personal statements of intention for what they plan to create in their lives in the next week, month, semester, and year. Unlike many of the efforts of schools to develop learning plans, this would be based differently. The student would be asked to focus on improving his immediate life satisfaction, as well as his life chances as he saw them at present. The goals established by students would be related to blocked areas of their lives: developing, improving, or repairing relationships; dealing with guilt or resentment; overcoming fears and inhibitions; accomplishing something such as getting a job (or making a present job more fulfilling), making an athletic team, or doing well on a college entrance examination.

Once the statements of intention were developed, students would set about to create those things in their lives. For most the next step would be some form of stretch: actually taking the first move toward dealing with an aspect of their lives that was less than

satisfactory. Each stretch would be worked out in conjunction with, and would be acceptable to, the teachers. Then support groups would be formed to assist each other in accomplishing the stretches. In particular, failure would be O.K. The student would just be encouraged to learn whatever the lessons were, and try it again.

Students would find, of course, that true accomplishment of the stretch experience would come when they took the stretch, set it in motion, allowed all of the fears, anxieties, considerations, and resisting beliefs about themselves to come up, and yet not succumb but surrender to the stretch experience they have set in motion. This 100 percent commitment, the getting so totally into the experience that one is carried along by it, provides the real breakthrough.

Periodically, students would recycle, reexamine their statements of intention, assess how well they had accomplished what they set out to do, determine whether any changes were needed, and incorporate these into new statements of intention.

In this model of education there would be enormous learning. As students developed goals that required learning: e.g., college entrance, promotions on jobs, increasing their marketable skills, their stretches would involve mastery of some body of knowledge. But primarily the change would be to remodel the underlying structure of schooling so that it supported the creation of an individual statement of intention, a personal "through-line" and a cyclical process which was focused on students increasing their life satisfaction.

The Personal Through-Line as the Focus for Life-Long Learning

The larger implications of this model are many. The second generation human potential programs start people, and support them over time, on a way of living life that appears to give them the chance to maximize their life satisfaction. The assistance in developing a personal set of goals, a life through-line for themselves, and the support to work through what is between themselves and the goals fills a critical gap in our culture. No other institutions presently fill this role. Without a personal life through-line, people are dependent on educational institutions, on the culture, on other people to tell them what they ought to do, or to help them in times of crisis. Since the relationship between the traditional answers given by these institutions and personal satisfaction is very small, people whose lives lack a sense of inner direction and purpose become alienated, distrustful, and lost.

Since the human potential movement is presently initiating a life-long process for personal growth, the public school system is merely one of the kinds of educational support systems that need to be redirected to assist people through the various phases and individual life transitions of their lives. We need an integrated relationship between all the educational systems/support systems in the country and the life stages through which people go.

The problem is one of reorienting these support institutions so that they assist people in creatively engaging with their own futures.

I do not think this change will be driven by the institutions. Mostly they are run by the crises they pretend to meet. The change will come from individuals committed to a life of continual growth and exploration, demanding that the institutions support them in their quest for their own fulfillment. It is this revolutionary implication that constitutes the real significance of the human potential movement.